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AUTHOR Allwright, Richard
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ABSTRACT

Communication has been accepted as an essential result of language teaching, but has been neglected as an essential component of the language teaching process. This paper suggests that teaching comprehensively for communicative competence will cater to a large extent to developing linguistic competence, whereas teaching for linguistic competence will tend to cater very little to developing communicative skills. Reorienting language teaching towards a major focus on communicative skills involves three basic elements: (1) samples of the target language; (2) guidance concerning the nature of the target language; and (3) management or directed learning activities. These elements can all be brought together in communication practice. A course at the Essex Language Centre is cited as one model of an ESL course stressing communication. This course combined English and new student orientation, and stressed having the student retrieve information on his own rather than having information given to him. (AM)

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LANGUAGE LEARNING THROUGH COMMUNICATION PRACTICE - Richard Allwright

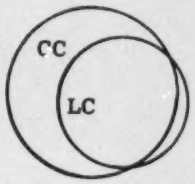
PART ONE: In defence of a minimal language teaching strategy

IT HAS been accepted for many years that 'communication' is the proper aim for language teaching. More recently increasing attention has been paid to what this might mean if taken seriously.[1] The implied charge that only lip-service has normally been paid to the aim of communication is difficult to prove, but perhaps not so difficult to accept, given that it does seem generally accepted that language teaching, globally, has not led to a satisfactory level of communicative skill in the vast majority of cases. Inspection of textbooks and national syllabuses (as well as of actual teaching) suggests that this failure could be blamed on the apparent failure to ensure that communicative skill is adequately represented in language courses. Textbooks and national syllabuses, typically, and for obvious reasons, present an analysis of language rather than of communicative skill. To put the position very simply, 'communication' has become fully accepted as an essential and major component of the 'product' of language teaching,

but it has not yet been given more than a token place (with some very honourable exceptions of course[2]), as an essential and major component of the 'process'. A logical extension of the argument would suggest that if communication is THE aim, then it should be THE major element in the process. The question could be put:

Are we teaching LANGUAGE (for communication)?
OR
Are we teaching COMMUNICATION (via language)?

Most teachers would probably quickly respond that they are first and foremost LANGUAGE teachers, by training and also by inclination, and they might at the same time object to the question, since it suggests that the two possibilities are mutually incompatible. My point is somewhat different. The two are not directly incompatible of course, but there is a logical relationship between them that demands attention. It is the same relationship as that which holds between linguistic competence and communicative competence. A diagram will make the point more clearly.



CC = Communicative Competence

LC = Linguistic Competence

The diagram implies that some areas of linguistic competence are essentially irrelevant to communicative competence[3], but that, in general, linguistic competence is a part of communicative competence. This modified part-whole relationship implies, in turn, that teaching comprehensively for linguistic competence will necessarily leave a large area of communicative competence untouched, whereas teaching equally comprehensively for communicative competence will necessarily cater for all but a small part of linguistic competence. If this way of specifying the relationship is generally correct, then, if we really have communication as the major aim of our (language) teaching, we would be well advised to focus on communicative skills, in the knowledge that this will necessarily involve developing most areas of linguistic competence as an essential part of the product, rather than focus on linguistic skills and risk failing to deal with a major part of whatever constitutes communicative competence.

What might it mean, however, to reorient language teaching towards a major focus on communicative skills? In discussing and attempting to answer this question I shall use a macro-analysis of language teaching that identifies three basic elements (for a full discussion see Allwright 1976[4]):

I SAMPLES of the target language.

These may or may not be intended as 'model' samples and they may come in spoken form or written form, from teachers, or learners, or teaching materials. They may simultaneously function as 'guidance' (see below).

II GUIDANCE concerning the nature of the target language.

Three main types of guidance are suggested:

G1 Rules, more or less explicit verbal formulations of characteristics of the target language (eg the rule for forming the passive in English).

G2 Cues, hints that draw the attention of the learner to features of the target language, but do not provide a rule or an explicit explanation (eg the use of underlining in blackboard work to draw attention to structural similarities or differences between two sample sentences).

G3 Simple Knowledge of Results, feedback that informs the learner about success or failure, from which the learner may be able to make inferences about the target language.

These three types of guidance are mutually exclusive by definition but of course most often combined in practice. Guidance given in the target language will simultaneously provide a sample or samples of that language, as indicated above under 'samples'. Guidance need not be provided in the target language, however, nor even via language at all (note the 'underlining' example for G2, above). Also, it must not be assumed that guidance comes only from the teacher or the teaching materials.

III MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES, normally designed for the express purpose of controlling the learners' exposure to the 'samples' of the target language, and to the forms of 'guidance' thought most appropriate by the teacher. It is normally the teacher, then, who is held responsible for the management of the learners' learning activities.

'Samples' of the target language, and the second and third forms of 'guidance' (cues and simple KR), are held to constitute both the necessary and the apparently sufficient characteristics of informal language learning (ie out-of-class learning, including first-language acquisition). It is thus the use of G1 (rules) and of 'management activities' that distinguishes formal, or 'taught' learning, in classrooms, from informal, or 'natural' learning[5]. Management activities, in particular, seem responsible for changing a learning situation from one of incidental learning (slow but relatively permanent if first-language acquisition is a guide, and perhaps not even so slow) to one of consciously directed learning (apparently faster but not always so long-lasting). Management activities are activities directed at achieving, producing learning, by ensuring, as suggested above, the occurrence of selected 'samples' of the target language and selected forms of 'guidance'. Linguistic research has been used by applied linguists[6], naturally enough, as the basis for prescribing what samples of the target should occur, and in what order, and also for prescribing the sorts of guidance that should be provided (particularly the sorts of explanation, as a direct reflection of linguistic theory, but also the use of cues to draw attention to features of the language - note that psychological theory has, of course, also been involved in decisions about guidance[7]). There is considerable doubt, however, concerning the state of our knowledge in all these areas[8], and at least some feeling that informal language learning (particularly of the first language) is remarkably more efficient than whatever goes on in classrooms when we set out to control the selection and sequencing of the target language samples and the types of guidance provided[9]. A minimal model of language teaching (to use Newmark's term[10]) might therefore demand of the teacher only that samples of the target language, and guidance (at least G2 and G3, cues and simple knowledge of results) as to the nature of the target language, should be made to occur, without pre-selection, and in any order. The strong form of such a minimal strategy could be defended on the grounds that any attempt at control would be most likely to interfere with learning, since, given the state of our knowledge in such matters, it could only be appropriate by chance[11].

The link between this somewhat perverse line of argument and communicative skills is remarkably simple. Self-evaluating activities directed at practising communica-

tive skills can easily be arranged to necessitate the generation, by the learners, of 'samples' of the target language. The success or failure of successive attempts to communicate in such tasks provides, automatically, G2 and G3 ('cues' and 'simple KR') from which the learners can infer the characteristics of the target language, as they might in the informal language learning situation this closely parallels.

If this is so, then we may conclude that if the 'language teacher's' management activities are directed exclusively at involving the learners in solving communication problems in the target language, then language learning will take care of itself, and the teacher can be fairly sure of not being guilty of unwarranted interference in the process. (Notice that 'normal' language teaching has great potential for confusing learners about the nature of the target language, precisely because, it seems, of the difficulties that arise when a teacher attempts, as most do, to systematise the learners' exposure to the language[12].)

A case can be made, therefore, for reorienting 'language' teaching towards communication practice, not just because the eventual product aim is 'communication', but because communication practice can be expected to develop linguistic skills[13].

There is an obvious objection to such a strategy, so obvious that it needs to be dealt with immediately. It seems patently clear that absolute beginners cannot be expected to solve communication problems in a language of which they are totally ignorant. An answer could be suggested in terms of the judicious management of small mixed ability learning groups, but its defence would take too much space. For the present, therefore, this objection is accepted, and Part Two will be devoted to a description of an attempt to apply this minimal language teaching strategy in what would usually be called a 'remedial' situation.

PART TWO: The minimal teaching strategy in action

I. The 'remedial' situation

For several years the Department of Language and Linguistics at the University of Essex has been providing remedial English classes, during term-time, for foreign students. More recently this service has been extended, so that we have been able to offer a sixty-hour, three-week pre-registration course in September each year[14]. Although Essex attracts a very high proportion of foreign students, the total numbers have been relatively small (given the small overall student population of the university), so that typically not more than about twenty foreign students have been involved each year. The small scale of the operation has encouraged an experimental approach but ruled out a strategy which has been favoured elsewhere - that of grouping students in classes according to their academic specialisation and of developing highly specific materials for each group. At Essex, by contrast, we have had to face the problem of a relatively small group of learners who are heterogeneous as to academic specialisation and also as to command of English.

At the same time, evidence has accumulated[15] suggesting that foreign students' problems are primarily problems of integration, of coping socially and financially, and only secondarily problems of linguistic competence. We had made some attempt to include what we have called 'orientation' work in our otherwise fairly standard 'remedial English' classes, but not really wholeheartedly, because it had never seemed to fit in very well with other sorts of work. The new evidence for the potential importance of 'orientation' work prompted the thought that communication problems could have, at least some of the time, an orientational content, thus killing the two birds with the one stone. The scene was therefore set, in

September 1974, for a radically different pre-registration course, with its emphasis shifted entirely to communicative skills aimed at providing 'orientation' to the social and academic life of the university.

Two more factors made crucial contributions to the final decision to adopt a radically different strategy for the course. Firstly, there was a virtually total disenchantment with standard thinking about 'remedial' classes. It seemed to us that a 'brush up your English' approach, based on the idea that learners should receive a 'rapid review' of English grammar, is asking for trouble in two major ways.

To begin with, a 'rapid' review of English grammar, taken really seriously, is likely to take even longer in a remedial context, because so many misconceptions that have taken root ('fossilisations') will have to be dealt with. Then there is the severe risk of boring the learners since, by definition almost, they will have done it all before and presumably may also be expected to have bad memories of it from the first time around (given that they presumably failed to learn it satisfactorily, for whatever reason, at that time) or, conversely, they will be bored whenever the 'rapid review' reminds them of something they have already learned properly. This last consideration raises the interesting pedagogical problem that, in a heterogeneous class, with learners from a variety of linguistic backgrounds, the group as a whole will, collectively, know it all already[16], so how do you select what to teach in your 'rapid review'? This last reflection raised the possibility of constructing a rational defence for a 'minimal strategy' that would leave guidance to chance, and to the learners, in a classroom situation that would prompt the learners to somehow pool their collective knowledge and learn from each other. This possibility then led to the idea that cooperative learning could be harnessed to facilitate the achievement of something too often neglected in the teaching of any subject - the development of learner independence (from the teacher, but mutual interdependence among the learners). Language learning puts the learner in an especially dependent position, usually, and this may well suit teachers who like the 'parent-child' relationship[17], but learners, I suggest, need independence training. The failure of learners to use outside what they have apparently learned inside the classroom may perhaps be accounted for more appropriately in terms of a failure to develop psychological independence than in terms of a failure to teach to a sufficient degree of 'overlearning'.

The second major factor in the final decision was the example set by Paul Heinberg[18] and his colleagues in Hawaii, where they had used communication problem activities (some with an obvious orientational content) with considerable success, and with students in a similar university situation. This example was a source of one or two specific teaching ideas but mainly of general encouragement.

II. The course itself

1. Preliminary decisions

To bring the minimal strategy to life some practical (but, we hoped, principled) decisions had to be taken. In retrospect it seems possible to see a rational thread through the thinking that preceded the change of strategy, but at the time we 19 felt we were taking quick decisions on little more than very strong feelings of distrust concerning past experience, and strong, almost euphoric, self-confidence and optimism concerning the possibilities offered by a radical break with the past. The following decisions were somehow taken, either shortly before, or in some cases very soon after, the students arrived in the middle of September 1974.

NEGATIVE:

1. Use no materials, published or unpublished, actually conceived or designed as materials for language teaching.

2. Avoid linguistic correction entirely (from the teacher, of course).

3. Refuse to supply words, or in any other way to simply 'give' language items to the learners.

4. Never introduce linguistic content for its own sake, or make any pre-selection of materials on a linguistic basis.

POSITIVE:

5. Be extremely supportive, but primarily of the learners' struggles towards independence from the teacher, and towards peer interdependence.

6. Allow time for learners to work at their own pace (except where, as with some small-scale communication problems, an artificial time constraint may be intrinsic to the task - see below).

7. Keep the learners busy, constantly engaged in 'productive' tasks.

2. The orientation content

The decisions listed above are concerned with process aims - what we wanted the learning process to be like. The more important aims of the course were naturally the product aims - what we wanted our learners to take away at the end. Detailed decisions had therefore to be taken about the orientation content. We decided, somewhat autocratically, that we wanted the learners, by the end of the three weeks, first of all to be familiar with the general layout of the university, and with its various facilities for food, recreation, health care, etc, as well as for study. Secondly we wanted them to know how to use such facilities, particularly the University Library, and also to be familiar with the regulations governing their various schemes of study. It also seemed important that they should get to know the Assistant Dean for Overseas Students, and realise his potential usefulness to them, that they should know at least something of the previous year's unrest in the university; and, perhaps above all, that they should know as much as possible about the particular course of study they intended to follow, especially in terms of the demands it was going to make upon them.

For many of these various purposes official documentation was readily available for exploitation in class, but, in line with the decision to emphasise the 'independence training' aspect, we decided to base exploitation on information retrieval problems to which such documentation would be relevant rather than on simple dissemination of the information. We also arranged such practical and familiar activities as an immediate guided tour of the whole university, and a guided visit to the Library, both followed up by associated information retrieval problems in conjunction with such documents as the Student Handbook and the official Guide to the Library. This approach dominated most of the orientation work: the emphasis was on making information available, but organising class activities so that students would have to dig for the relevant information, in the hope that by so doing they would learn about how to get all sorts of information, as

well as learn the particular information needed to solve a retrieval problem. They would, at least, learn to 'find their way round' the various documents we were able to put in front of them.

For what seemed likely to be the most important of the purposes outlined above, that of ensuring that students would know as much as possible about the particular courses of study they intended to follow, a different approach was needed because the relevant documentation was not all readily available. A project approach was devised, calling upon the students first to collectively prepare the questions they would need to ask in order to find out all they wished to know about their intended courses of study, and then to go out to their various departments to seek the answers before returning to class to share the results.

A further approach adopted for the exploitation of orientation material was to draw attention to key passages in important documents (for example, the 'Annan Report' on the University's severe problems of the previous year, and the students' reply to that Report) by presenting the passages in a modified 'cloze' test form (ie with a number of words omitted, but not necessarily every nth word). With this sort of exploitation the cooperative element was introduced by what might be called 'progressively inclusive' group work. One form of this involved the students in first attempting to complete the gapped passage individually. The next step was for the students to form pairs and for each pair to attempt to reach consensus before joining another pair to attempt to reach a consensus again as a foursome. Then each four (in a class of sixteen) would join another group to reach consensus as a group of eight. Finally the two eights would compare and discuss their solutions to the 'cloze' problem, and attempt to reach a final consensus that could then be compared to the original document. This approach ensured very considerable discussion of the content of the documents of course, and thus provided important orientation work as well as reading comprehension practice (among several other things). At all stages the teacher would concentrate on 'management activities'[20], avoiding involvement in linguistic discussions, but prepared to help the learners in the content discussion so necessary to their successful filling of the gaps in the text. Even in the area of the content discussion a 'low profile' was adopted, with the teacher trying to ask 'attention-directing' questions rather than supplying relevant information.

A final approach to the exploitation of orientation materials was adopted for a particularly difficult problem, that of interpreting official regulations. Again, rather than involve the teacher in attempting to 'explain' (a teaching strategy that could be labelled 'telling', with all the inefficiency the term can suggest), a learner-centred approach was tried, calling upon the students, again in groups, to take a different regulation per group and attempt to paraphrase it in a way that would render it comprehensible to the others. This proved a productive exercise that very effectively drew attention to key disciplinary regulations, and of course to real problems (not just for non-native speakers of English) in their interpretation.

Of the four approaches outlined above the first two (the 'information retrieval' and the 'project' approaches) were fairly obviously non-language-centred, whereas the last two ('cloze' and 'paraphrase') were equally clearly calling for very special attention to be paid to language. In this way they came nearest to 'standard' language teaching practices, but it should not be forgotten that the content in each case was chosen solely for its orientation value, and the exploitation was designed to draw attention to the content via the language problems posed by the 'cloze'

and 'paraphrase' tasks. Orientation was the 'product'; attention to language was an essential part of the 'process'. The teacher's role was therefore importantly different from that of the language teacher. It was not easy for the teachers[21] to avoid 'language teaching' (and we sometimes caught ourselves in the act), but it did seem right to try, because by strictly avoiding turning content discussions into linguistic discussions we seemed to be succeeding in building up our students' confidence in their ability to cope, in English, with a whole variety of problems. This confidence-building aspect became crucial to our whole approach. It felt somewhat perverse, even to us, to avoid linguistic correction as strenuously as we did, but it seemed to work. Our students kept themselves extremely busy, talking in English and often discussing English, without the inhibitions often created by the standard language-teaching strategy that naturally focusses on linguistic accuracy rather than on communicative effectiveness. (This focus on linguistic accuracy is very persistent among language teachers, for obvious reasons, but it can easily be counterproductive, of course, tending to produce learners afraid to risk using the target language for fear of making some linguistic mistake that may well be almost totally irrelevant to effective communication. The problem of the language teacher's natural focus on linguistic accuracy prompts the suggestion that study skills courses, for instance, ought to be taught by study skills experts sensitive to language rather than by language teachers sensitive to study problems.) This consideration leads easily on to the other aspect of course-content - communicative skills development.

3. Communicative skills development

All the forms of exploitation of orientation content involved a variety of forms of communication, and this posed a variety of communication problems. It seemed worth while, however, to draw attention to communicative skills themselves by providing a number of communication problems, some very simple and some very elaborate, that would provide light relief from the orientation work in terms of content, but would nevertheless be of sufficient intrinsic interest to ensure active productive student participation.

At the simplest level was the following communication game. Two players are involved, seated at a table with a screen between them. In front of each player is a set of five small objects (we used coloured counters and dice). The players have identical sets. A third student makes a pattern with the objects in front of one of the players. That player must then attempt, in thirty seconds only, to give verbal instructions to the other player, to enable him to put his set of objects into the same pattern. At the end of thirty seconds the screen is lifted so that an immediate check can be made on the effectiveness of the communication. The third student then makes a pattern for the second player to describe. After each player has had three attempts, one of them takes over the role of problem-setter and timekeeper from the third student.

The thirty-second constraint guarantees failure most of the time, but not all of the time. It has the great advantage of being obviously monstrous, which in effect means that no one need feel ashamed of failure. A more 'reasonable' time limit is disastrous psychologically, in our experience (Heinberg's work in Hawaii was our model in this respect).

This sort of 'instant', trivial, silly communication problem proved extremely useful in itself, because it drew attention very successfully to two key points. Firstly, it necessitated the precise use of language, and equal precision in listening. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, it

demonstrated that good communication with a poor command of English may be better able to cope with communication problems in English than much more fluent speakers who are poor communicators. It was one of the 'weakest' students (on the ELBA[22] test) who was the first to succeed in communicating a pattern in thirty seconds, while much more fluent speakers (including myself!) struggled in vain to reach the same degree of concise precision.

These 'simple' communication games also proved extremely useful for a quite different reason. Given the intention to allow students to work at their own pace as much as possible, it was natural that groups doing orientation work would finish at different times and necessary that no embarrassment or time-wasting should be allowed to ensue. It was very simple to divert the early finishers towards simple communication games that could be started very quickly and interrupted without difficulty when necessary. The classroom was so arranged that such games were left available at all times, ready for any students who might otherwise have time on their hands.

At the other extreme, the most elaborate of communication games took up to four class-hours to play, preferably with an overnight gap between two two-hour sessions. For this game the class was divided into two pairs of groups with four students in each group. Each group was in competition with the other in its pair, but could ignore the other pairs of groups. Each group was given a set of Lego bits (child's plastic construction kit) sufficient for the construction of a different model (in our game always a vehicle). With each set of bits was a set of purely visual instructions[23]. The first task was to build the model in accordance with the visual instructions, and then to write verbal instructions that would entirely replace the visual ones. This process would take the first two hours, often leaving the verbal instructions still incomplete. Hence the advantage of an overnight break for the students to continue with the task out of class. On the second day the groups would re-form and finalise their verbal instructions before exchanging them with the other group in the pair. The bits would also be exchanged, of course, but not the visual instructions. For the final phase of the game the groups attempted to build the models, following the written instructions to the letter, giving no benefit to the doubt and returning the instructions for refinement if they proved uninterpretable. The winning group was the group whose instructions led the more speedily to the correct construction of the model (by the rival group).

The competitive element proved quite unimportant in practice, because the tasks themselves proved extremely interesting and productive, particularly in terms of vocabulary expension. Once again the teacher had to refrain from 'interfering' in any way, even when asked, as it seemed ultimately much more fruitful for the teacher to concentrate almost entirely on 'management activities'. Students frequently asked for help, of course, particularly for the words they lacked to describe the pieces of plastic themselves, but we tried very hard to refuse, and thus to force them to struggle until they found something adequate themselves, presumably by dredging their memories (and/or consulting dictionaries, of course, since the ability and willingness to consult a dictionary is crucial to 'independence training'). The wisdom of this refusal on the part of the teacher to act as a supplier of words was supported, long after the course itself was finished, when I played the Lego game with some non-native teachers of English. I unthinkingly supplied a word to one of the groups, on request, only to hear them argue, shortly afterwards, that they could not in fact use the word I had supplied, because if they had previously lacked it, then it was most likely that their rival group also lacked it, and thus its use would be a barrier to effective communication. The point was neatly made that effective communication depends on a sensitivity to

the receiver. To be effective messages do not need to be 'correct' in any absolute (linguistic?) sense. But they do have to be 'correct' in a relative sense, 'correct', that is, relative to the decoding abilities of the intended receiver.

The objection can be made here, and has often been made, that in the circumstances of the course under discussion the pressures for effective communication rather than linguistic accuracy must surely lead to the adoption of a classroom pidgin English, effective only between non native speakers, and perhaps even peculiar to the particular group of students involved. This is a serious objection that deserves discussion. The danger involved would certainly be considerable if the group were homogeneous with regard to their mother tongue. That was not the case for the course under discussion, but the point remains and special measures would have to be devised to help homogeneous groups (perhaps by the introduction of native speakers as full participants for at least some activities). With heterogeneous multilingual groups the problem is less severe, since what is understandable to a great variety of non-native speakers is likely to work at least with a reasonably tolerant native speaker. It may also be worth accepting the danger, because it can be argued that it is more important that the foreign students develop confidence in their ability to rely on each other. If they are pushed into trying to meet external standards of acceptability, they may become inhibited and not even have the confidence to use their English to develop relationships with other foreign students. Anecdotal evidence supports this view since one of our students did express his gratitude for our course precisely by pointing out that it had enabled him to make proper contact with some fellow-students, whereas he had spent the previous year (also at Essex) able to cope with 'official' demands on his English, but too inhibited in everyday exchanges to profit from the company of fellow-students. A further, and very important, point to be considered is that the development of communicative self-confidence in such learners is perhaps crucial to their further linguistic development. While it is undoubtedly true that some learners will respond well to strictly 'language' courses in circumstances where they also have pressing communication needs, it seems intuitively reasonable to suggest that the strain on most learners will be considerable, if they are faced with the twin problems of developing linguistic accuracy and achieving communicative self-confidence, but only receiving help with the first of the two. It would seem more helpful to concentrate on developing their communicative ease first, to facilitate their integration into academic and social life, and thus to clear the way for a subsequent development of such linguistic accuracy as they may desire[24], free from any additional problem of communicative insecurity.

III. Concluding comments

The above description of the September 1974 course is necessarily partial, intended primarily to give the 'flavour' of the thinking and the various activities involved rather than an exhaustive account of the whole course. So far, however, nothing has been said about the success, or otherwise, of the minimal strategy as we first put it into practice. It is too easy to say to be convincing, perhaps, but the first comment to make under such a heading is that it is of course virtually impossible to evaluate such a course in anything other than a trivial way. We certainly attempted no systematic post-testing (being generally as disenchanted with tests as we were with standard teaching materials) and relied instead on a 'process' rather than a 'product' evaluation. In practice this meant trying to evaluate the extent to which the course fostered what appeared to be 'productive' learning processes. From this point of view most of the activities were highly successful (from our point of view

as no doubt biassed observers) in that they seemed remarkably productive in linguistic terms. The students were far busier, linguistically (using the language and grappling with the language), and attendance was far better, than on our previous standard remedial courses. The students were almost constantly involved in a linguistic struggle, but a well-motivated one. The course seemed to be providing what so many courses clearly fail to provide - reasons for communicating rather than 'items for use should a reason for communicating ever present itself'. By taking the focus completely off the language as content and putting it onto orientation problems or otherwise trivial but intriguing communication games, we paradoxically succeeded in drawing attention to the language and motivating intense concentration on its complexities.

We cannot know whether or not we were providing the best possible sort of course for our learners, but we do know we were far happier with what we were doing than we had ever been with more orthodox strategies. It made sense to us, and felt right.

Postscript, November 1976

The rationale presented in Part One was developed after the event as a major part of our attempt to understand what we had done, and why. Since then I have had the opportunity to test out the essential ideas in a variety of situations with different 'content aims'. What has emerged most strongly as a problem is the question of how to 'sell' such a course to learners who expect (and of course may strongly believe they most need) a perfectly standard language course. If the teacher is convinced (as we were at the time) that the teacher is within his or her rights to impose a given strategy in what seem to be the best interests of the learners, then a 'cheerful steamroller' technique seems warranted, but only if the teacher is able to spend time, out of class probably, trying to convince those who are unhappy with such a radical departure from the norm. Teachers who are not themselves fully convinced about the likely usefulness of the strategy in their situation, but who are prepared to give it a fair trial, should be warned that a tentative approach to implementing the strategy is most likely to be doomed from the start (just as it is with any strategy, perhaps, but probably even more so in the case of the sort of 'bizarre' strategy under discussion). The teacher will therefore need to teach as if thoroughly convinced, while remaining inwardly sceptical.

To end on a wholly positive note, the most encouraging outcome of further use of the strategy is that it continues to 'feel right' both in day-to-day work with learners, and on reflection, in the light of the response of many learners, who value being prompted, and trusted, to make a more substantial contribution to their own learning.

Notes and References

1. I have in mind principally the whole ESP 'movement'. It uses a different terminology but reflects a serious concern with enabling learners to 'do things with words' rather than simply to 'know the language'.

2. Sandra Savignon's work is well-known in this respect. For an excellent report of her research see her 'Teaching for Communicative Competence' in AVLA Journal, Vol 3, Winter 1972, pp 153-162.

3. The relative size of the two circles is a matter of unquantifiable conjecture, however reasonable or unreasonable it looks.

4. Allwright, R L (1976): 'Putting Cognitions on the Map' in UCLA TESL Workpapers 1976, available from TESL section, Department of English, UCLA, Los Angeles, California 90026. (Revised version of paper delivered at AILA Congress, Stuttgart, August 1975.)

5. For important related discussion see Krashen, S D, and Seliger, H (1975): 'The essential contributions of formal instruction in adult second language learning', TESOL Quarterly, Vol 9, pp 173-183.

6. For example see Politzer, R L (1961): Teaching French: An Introduction to Applied Linguistics, Boston, Ginn & Co.

7. But J B Carroll, in 1966, drew attention to the poor use being made of psychological theory in language teaching. See Carroll, J B: 'Psychology, Research, and Language Teaching' in Valdman, A (ed, 1966): Trends in Language Teaching, McGraw-Hill, p 104.

8. Chomsky made the point rather memorably in 1966, at the North-East Conference on the Teaching of Modern Languages, and things do not seem to have improved since then.

9. But see Krashen, S D (1976): 'Formal and Informal Linguistic Environments in Language Acquisition and Language Learning' in TESOL Quarterly, Vol 10, No 2 pp 157-168.

10. See his contribution to the Second AILA Congress, Cambridge, 1969, printed in The Psychology of Second Language Learning, Pimsleur, P, and Quinn, T (eds), CUP, 1971, entitled 'A Minimal Language-Teaching Program', pp 11-18.

11. This argument rests on a denial of the validity of experience unsupported by research and theory. Humans do find it extraordinarily hard to learn by experience, in such matters, however, and the 'common sense' they do thus acquire is notoriously suspect, of course.

12. See Allwright, R L (1975): 'Problems in the Study of the Language Teacher's Treatment of Learner Error', in New Directions in Second Language Learning, Teaching, and Bilingual Education, edited by Burt, M K and Dulay, H C, TESOL, 1975. See also: McTear, M (1975): 'Potential Sources of Confusion in Foreign Language Classrooms: The Rules of the Game', paper delivered to the AILA Congress, Stuttgart, August 1975.

13. Accuracy, it may be objected, must surely suffer. Any loss, however, might well be more than compensated for by a corresponding gain in communicative skill. Also, it is arguable that communicative ease is necessary, though insufficient, for the development of accuracy. (Recent research by David Richards at the University of Essex, under the title 'The development of communicative efficiency in second language learning - a case study of two adult French learners of English', is relevant to this argument, though not conclusive.) My own experience suggests that accuracy can be developed, in the classroom, and within the principles of the minimal teaching strategy, after communication has been achieved.

14. Even more recently two fulltime members of staff have been appointed to an EFL Unit to take over responsibility for all such service English courses.

15. See Sen, A (1970): Problems of Overseas Students and Nurses, Slough, NFER. For a brief summary of Sen's survey see Yates, A (ed): Students from Overseas, Slough, NFER, 1971. For a very recent discussion on the same topic, see Davies, A: 'Do Foreign Students have Problems?' in ELT Documents, 75/3, pp 18-21.

16. An oversimplification, perhaps, but a useful one to take seriously.

17. See Stevick, E Q (1976): Memory, Meaning, and Method, some psychological perspectives on language learning, Newbury House. See especially Chapter 5: 'The Meaning of Drills and Exercises', pp 65-84.

18. Personal communication. There appears to be nothing published of direct relevance. Dr Heinberg can be contacted at the Speech and Communication Department, University of Hawaii, Honolulu, Oahu, Hawaii.

19. Working with me at this stage was Julia Cleave, whose enthusiastic cooperation was extremely valuable to me personally as well as to the course.

20. This frequently involved leaving the room to get on with the preparation of future class activities. These teacher absences were originally the product of simple necessity, but they proved to be another valuable 'weapon' in the war against dependence on the teachers.

21. Julia Cleave and myself, principally, joined later by Valerie Kay and Ann Hosking.

22. The Edinburgh Language Battery devised by Elizabeth Ingram.

23. Provided by the manufacturer in each box.

24. 'Such linguistic accuracy as they may desire' is intended to imply that learners need to be allowed to make up their own minds as to the level of linguistic perfection they should aim at. For some the achievement of communicative ease will suffice, and we should respect that (although we may still spend time trying to persuade a student otherwise, of course). Others will see increased linguistic accuracy as relevant to their academic and/or social aims and will respond accordingly.

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